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NATURALIST NOTEBOOK

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VOLUME III

NO. 9

CONTENTS

Front Cover: Mushroom
Photo by Dewire

CHILDREN'S SECTION

Nature Calendar	1
Children's Corner	3
Pet Corner	4
Rock Hounds	5
After The Tide	6

ADULT SECTION

Articles of Adult Interest	10
Your Own Family Jaunt	13
Field Notes	15

ACTIVITIES FOR SEPTEMBER

..... Inside back cover.

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ROBERT C. DEWIRE--*Naturalist*

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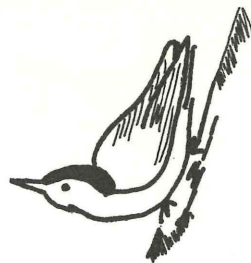
The Thames Science Center is a nonprofit organization seeking a quality environment through education.

The active support of children and adults in the Science Center, its programs, activities and efforts is earnestly solicited.

JOHN F. GARDNER
Editor

The Interpretive Museum of 622 Williams Street, New London, Connecticut 06320
The Peace Sanctuary Nature Preserve At 200 River Road, Mystic, Connecticut 06355

SEPTEMBER'S NATURE CALENDAR



Nuthatch

SEPTEMBER is the month of the return of birds to your feeders. During the summer, anyone who put out sunflower seeds would receive occasional visits from chickadees, titmice, cardinals, nuthatches and purple and house finches. These birds were more noticeable in late summer when the young birds were out of the nest and were being brought to the feeder area.

By mid-September one should put his feeding station back into full operation. This means including suet and mixed or wild bird seed as well as sunflower. You will notice many more birds will come and their visits will be more often.

The reason for the return to the feeders is the steady decline in insect food as the month progresses. Much to your pleasure, you will notice a sharp decline in mosquitoes during this period and this drop in numbers is occurring in other insects also. The birds therefore now turn from their major food source of the summer and change their diet to seeds and berries. This is when they return to the feeders.

Downy and hairy woodpeckers will come to the suet block and a little red-capped sparrow called a chipping sparrow will eat mix seed off the ground. He will leave for the South in November. Two of our winter residents will arrive from the North this month--the junco and white-throated sparrow.



SEPTEMBER'S NATURE CALENDAR

September is the month of migrating birds and leaves of other colors.

September 1... Swallows line telephone wires by the hundreds as they prepare to fly South.

September 3... New England asters are in flower in fields.

September 6... Full moon called the Corn Moon.

September 10... Bees and wasps in great numbers feed on fields of goldenrod.

September 13... Clumps of bright red Jack-in-the-pulpit berries are in swampy areas.

September 17... Trees begin to color; maples red, birches yellow.

September 18... Peak of warbler migration in wooded areas.

September 20... Woodchucks begin fattening up for the long winter sleep ahead.

September 21... Large praying mantis can be found in fields.

September 24... Night-hawks pass overhead in the evenings migrating South.

September 26... Day and night are of equal length.

September 27... White-throated sparrows and juncos arrive at feeding stations.

September 29... Amphibians--frogs, toads and salamanders begin to burrow for the winter months.

September 30... Baldpate ducks--one of the first of our winter resident ducks--arrives.

THE CHILDREN'S CORNER *by TRUDY GARDNER*

A MIGRATING BUTTERFLY

This is the month of migration. We have a butterfly that also migrates, this is the Monarch butterfly.

It usually arrives in Connecticut from the south in mid-July. While here it lays its eggs and feeds on the nectar of the flowers.

In fall as the cold weather arrives the Monarchs gather in large flocks and move South where they originally came from. It is not understood how they find their way.

The Monarch is distasteful to birds, and its brilliant colors are an advertisement to all birds that here is an insect which has a most disagreeable taste.

All this month and next watch the fields and you may see the Monarchs migrating.



PET CORNER

by DAVE RICHARDS

Most fish hobbyists, I have found, never think of keeping our native fish in their aquariums. They usually purchase fish in a pet shop, imported from such places as the Amazon, Hong Kong and Africa. Did you know, however, that our native sunfish (or punkin seeds) are in great demand to hobbyists in Germany and other foreign countries? They are closely related to the cichlids that we so often buy at high prices.

To catch a sunfish, you need a small net; if you are very careful you can catch them with a line and small hook. Keep only one or two, being very careful not to harm them while taking them home. Enough water should be taken from the pond where the sunfish were caught, and fill at least a ten-gallon tank.

No heater is necessary in the tank, but a pump and filter should be used for aeration (sunfish are cold-water fish and do not like a warm tank). The tank should be placed in the coolest part of the room. Food should be provided just as for tropical fish, with a lot of live food mixed with frozen and dried.

It is really enjoyable to keep our native sunfish in an aquarium at home. Be sure though, before you catch any, to check with your local game warden and get his opinion and permission.

ROCK HOUNDS

by JERRY THEILER

IGNEOUS ROCKS

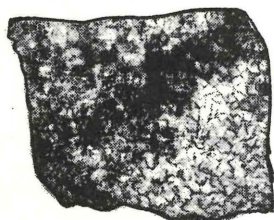
Last month we talked about the three groups of rocks--Igneous, Sedimentary, and Metamorphic. If you remember we said that the Igneous Rocks were the fire formed rocks and almost always have crystals that you can see. By examining the crystals of rocks and examining their size and color you can identify the common Igneous rocks of Southeastern Connecticut.

If you pick up a rock with crystals that are not lined up into lines of any kind you probably have an igneous rock.

Using the following chart you can identify it:

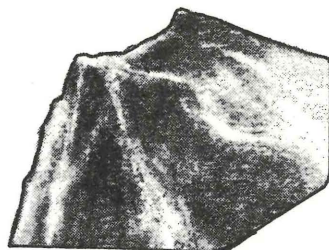
Size of crystal	Light color	Dark color
Fine	Felsite	Basalt
Medium	Granite	Diabase
Coarse	Pegmatite	Gabbro

Some pictures to help you:



GRANITE

BASALT



While Mr. Theiler is on vacation

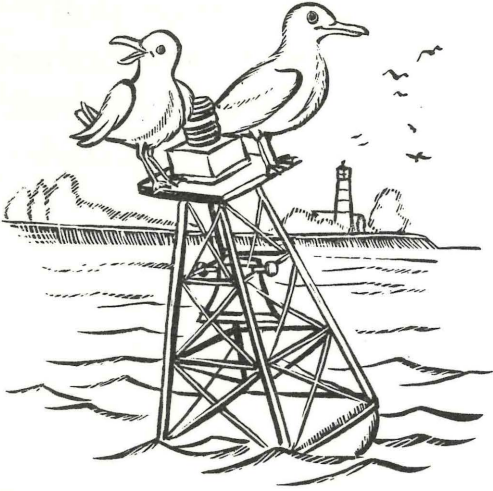
Mr. Gardner is filling in.....



After the Tide

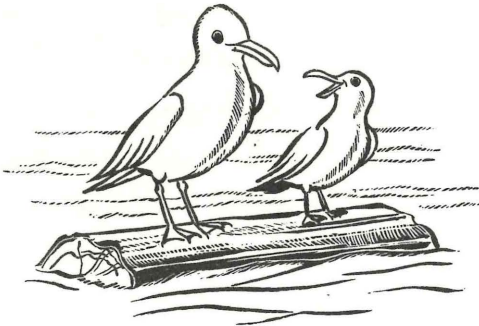
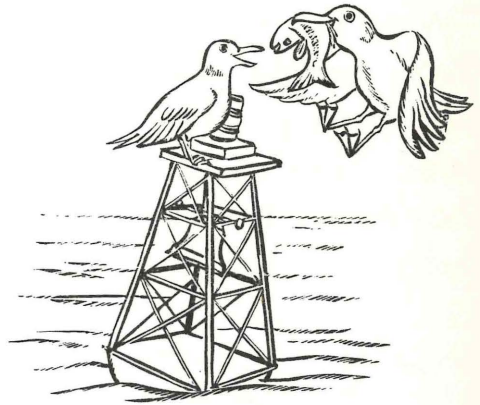


BY-DOROTHY JANE GOULDING-
ILLUSTRATED BY-RICHARD D BROWN,

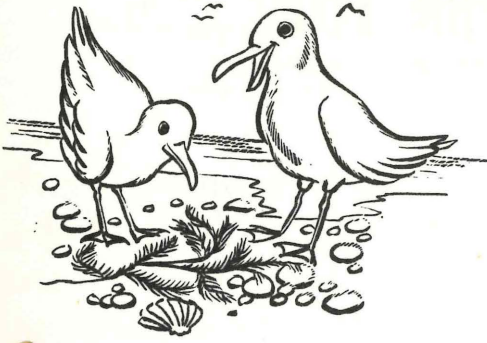


A seagull sat on a buoy off the shore with her baby beside her. "Watch," she said. "The tide is going out, and perhaps it will leave us something good to eat."

Leaving her baby, she dove into the water. And soon, back she came, with a fish in her mouth. "Eat this," she said. "And then follow me. We're going in to the shore."

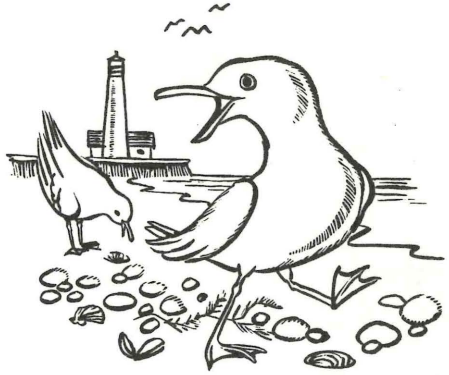


They stopped to rest for a moment on a piece of driftwood floating on the water. "What will we find on the shore?" the little one wanted to know. "You'll soon see," answered his mother.

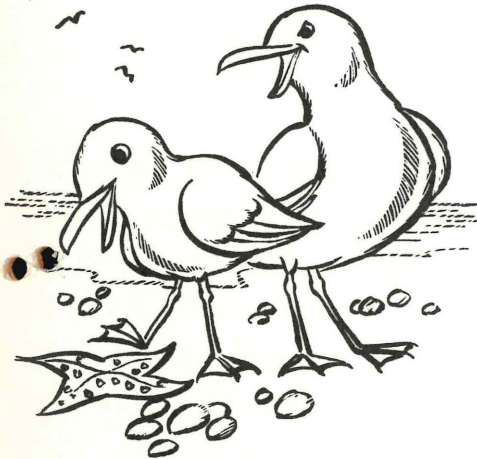


They flew in to the sand, and landed on the beach. "Oh," squawked the baby. "What's this green stuff?" "It's seaweed," his mother told him. "Often, if you look through it, you'll find something good to eat."

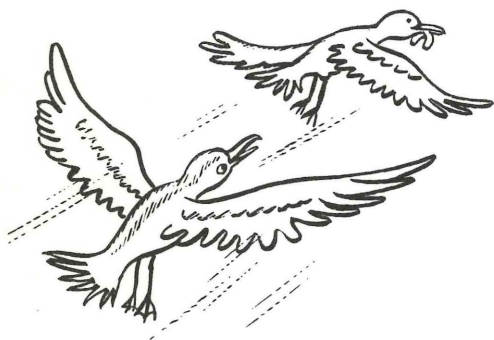
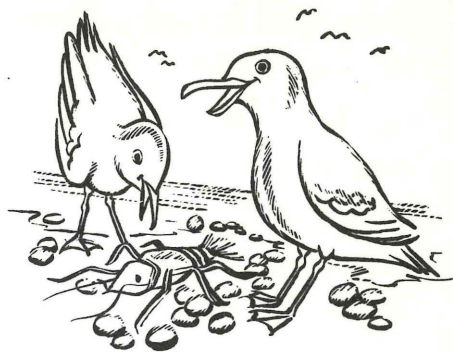
She went ahead along the beach, but baby gull stayed to play with something. "What are you doing with those empty shells?" she said crossly, a few minutes later. "They're no use." "But they're pretty," thought the baby.



By a mistake, he stepped on to a piece of water that had shape to it. "What is that?" he wanted to know. "That's a jelly fish," snapped his mother. "I wish you would watch where you're going. You'll get hurt in a minute."

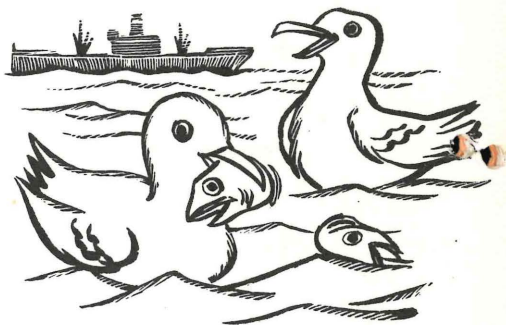


"Now here is something," said mother gull. She had found a dead lobster in the seaweed. The baby ran up and began to tug at it too, and soon they were both having a fine feast.

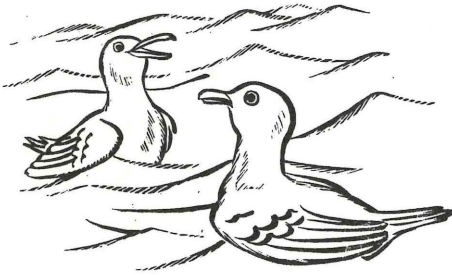
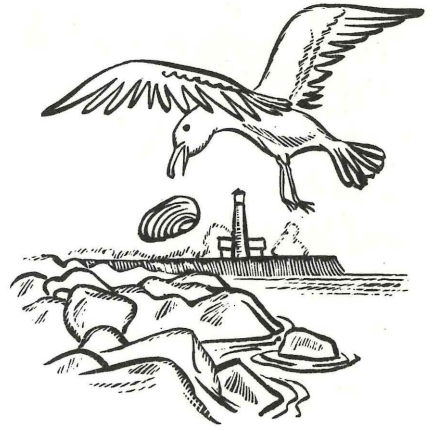


"AWRKKK"—that was Mrs. Gull. Another gull had come and snatched away a piece of the lobster. "Come back thief!" she screamed as she flew after him. While they were fighting, the little gull finished what was left.

"Come here," called his mother. The other gull had flown away, and now, floating on the water, she found some garbage thrown out from a passing ship. The two gobbled up the fish heads they found.



Baby gull found a clam with its shell tightly shut. "I can't open it," he complained. His mother flew up in the air with it in her beak. Then she dropped it on the rocks, where it broke in pieces. "Now eat it," she said.

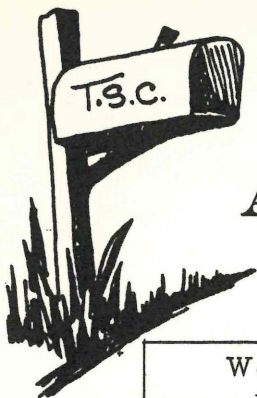


When the two gulls were full, they flew back out to sea. This time, they rested by riding on the waves. Up and down, up and down, they rode. "I like this game," said the little one. "But I think I'm getting sleepy."

"It's time we found a place to spend the night," said his mother. And spreading their wings, they flew off to a rocky cliff where they slept, the little one warm and comfortable under his mother's soft feathers.



From: Canadian Audubon Society



ARTICLES OF ADULT INTEREST

We welcome notice of Conservation activities or problems for inclusion in this section of the Naturalist's Notebook. . . . Please let us know of your local activity so that others may be aware of your efforts and lend their support where possible. . . .

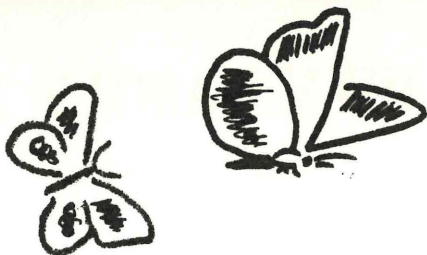
BIG TREES IN CONNECTICUT. . . . A statewide search is being made this year to try and find the largest trees of each species growing in Connecticut. Anyone who knows of a tree that they think is of unusual size, they should take its measurements and report them. This is what should be done. Circumference should be measured with a steel tape from $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet above the ground. The diameter of the crown can be measured by placing a stake in the ground directly under the tip of the farthest spreading branch on either side of the tree and measuring the distance between the two stakes. Height will have to be estimated on very tall trees.

If you find a tree of interest, use a postcard and record the following information. (1) Species of tree; (2) Circumference to the nearest inch at $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet above ground; (3) Height to nearest foot; (4) Average width of crown to nearest foot; (5) Location of tree--town, street, distance from street or intersection, owner of property if known; (6) State of preservation or condition; (7) your name, address and phone number. If you send this information to the Science Center, we will forward it to those compiling the data.

BARN ISLAND... The Southeastern Connecticut Regional Planning Agency (SCRPA) is shelving the plans to make a State Park in the Palmer Neck Road--Barn Island area of Wequetequock Cove. Plans now will call for the area along the east side of the cove to become an area of low density development with a house being placed on a minimum of three to four acres of land.

POISONOUS SNAKES... A national survey has shown that poisonous snakes bite males between the ages of 5 and 19 most frequently. It is estimated that 6,680 persons are bitten annually in the United States, but only 15 of these injuries prove fatal. The most frequent cause for the fatal cases was a delay of several hours or even days after being bitten before medical aid was sought.

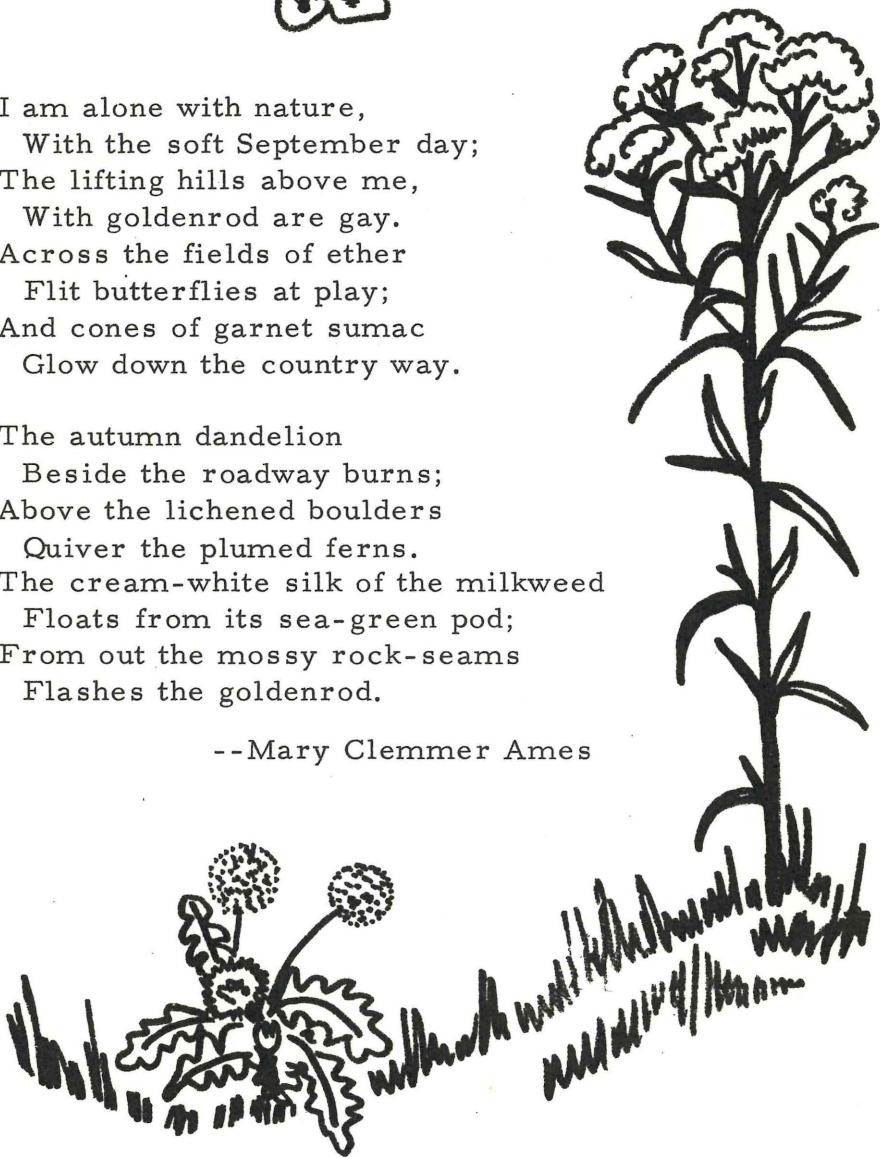
TRAIL GUIDE AVAILABLE... The Seventh Edition of the Connecticut Walk Book, a complete guide for 500 miles of the Blue Blazed Trail System, is now available. The 120-page publication contains 25 trail maps which indicate the location of the blue-blazed trails throughout the state. There is also descriptive information on trails, scenic views and points of historical and geological interest. The cost of the book is \$3.50 plus 12 cents sales tax for Conn. residents. The book may be obtained from the Connecticut Forest and Park Association, P. O. Box 389, East Hartford, Conn. 06108.



I am alone with nature,
With the soft September day;
The lifting hills above me,
With goldenrod are gay.
Across the fields of ether
Flit butterflies at play;
And cones of garnet sumac
Glow down the country way.

The autumn dandelion
Beside the roadway burns;
Above the lichened boulders
Quiver the plumed ferns.
The cream-white silk of the milkweed
Floats from its sea-green pod;
From out the mossy rock-seams
Flashes the goldenrod.

--Mary Clemmer Ames



YOUR OWN FAMILY JAUNT

by BOB DEWIRE

MOUNT TOM, MASS.

In September, the fall migration is in full swing with shorebirds and songbirds passing through here in great numbers. There is also another group of birds flying South at this time. These are the hawks and Mount Tom in Massachusetts is the best place in all of New England to see their often spectacular flights.

Mount Tom is in Holyoke, Mass., about an hour and 45 minutes from New London. It is reached by taking Route 2 to Hartford and connecting there with I91 to Springfield and then taking Route 5 which goes right by the entrance to the mountain.

Upon arriving drive to the top, where you will come to a stone house. There are two 40-foot observation towers on the mountain and these are the best vantage points. One is reached by going left on the road just behind the building. The other tower is called the Goat's Peak Tower and is reached by taking the right hand road from the stone house. Park in the parking lot and walk up the road a short distance to the tower.

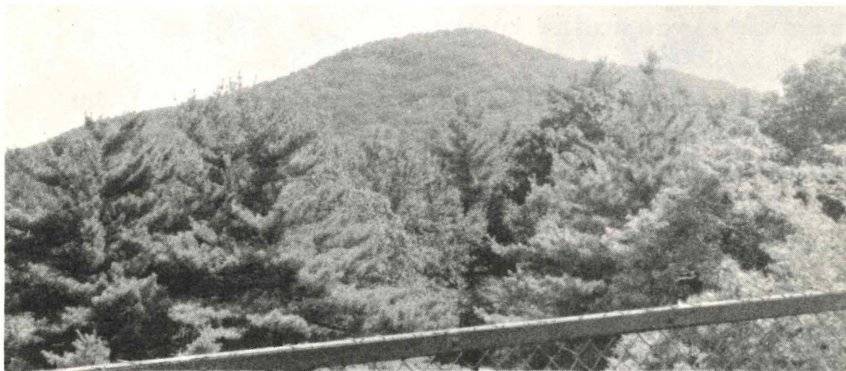
Both towers provide spectacular views of the Connecticut River Valley, but the Goat's Peak Tower allows one to see in all directions while the other tower's east facing side is blocked by trees.

Hawks migrate in the greatest number in September, but often early October is very good also. Hawks, like people, never like to get up

early, so there is little activity before 9:30 A.M. Anytime from this point to about 4:30 P.M. can be good. Wind is also an important factor. Any wind out of the north is best, but a northwest wind is best of all. Southerly winds or no winds at all will result in few to no hawks.

The broad-winged hawk is the bird usually seen in the greatest numbers. They often travel in flocks of a hundred or more and may pass right over the towers. The hawks follow the mountain range South and many will fly directly alongside or below the towers so that one looks down on them. Generally, species you may see in order of abundance are: Broad-winged hawk, sparrow hawk, osprey, red-tailed hawk, sharp-shinned hawk, marsh hawk, pigeon hawk and red-shouldered hawk. Other rarer birds that pass through but can never be counted on include the Cooper's hawk, peregrine falcon and bald eagle.

If on the day you go up there it turns out to be a "bluebird day" (little to no wind) and hawks are not about, try some land birding in the woods around the towers. Fall migrants will be all through the woods and such specialties as the red-breasted nuthatch and pileated woodpecker are possible. Picnic areas are all over the mountain so for an all day trip to a beautiful and interesting area visit Mount Tom.



Goat's Peak — Seen from the Southern Observation Tower

FIELD NOTES

July 15 - August 15

Essex, Lyme and East Haddam: At Devil's Hopyard SWEET PEPPERBUSH flowered on July 28th and a BLACKBURNIAN WARBLER was feeding young on the same day. A RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH was present there on Aug. 1st. A dead GRAY FOX was found in the Meadow Woods Natural Area in Essex on July 17th. A YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT HERON was on a mud flat in the Blackhall River in Lyme on July 27th.

East Lyme, Waterford and New London: First flowering dates include MONKEY FLOWER on July 24th and PURPLE-FRINGED ORCHID on the 27th in Montville, THISTLE in the Arboretum on July 31st and JOE-PYE-WEED, LADIES TRESSES and WHITE BONESET at Mary Butler Drive on July 27th, and Aug. 4th and 12th resp. CICADAS were calling from July 27th on. A COMMON WATER SNAKE measuring 3 feet long with a diameter of 5 inches was at the Arboretum pond on July 31st. WOODCOCK were recorded in East Lyme and Flanders on July 20th and 22nd. WOOD DUCK have been seen regularly at Lake Brandigee and the Arboretum pond since July 31st. Up to 8 have been seen at the Arboretum. Also at the Arboretum was a RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH in the ravine on August 14th.

A BLACK SKIMMER flew along Magonk Point on July 16th and presumably the same bird was sitting on the mud flat at the Harkness inlet on the 19th. Also at Harkness there were 3 COMMON EGRETS on July 16th and 50 SEMIPALMATED PLOVERS and 10 RUDDY TURNSTONES on Aug. 6th. An

early migrating NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH was at Mary Butler Drive on July 31st and CEDAR WAXWINGS have been reported from several places. A WORM-EATING WARBLER was seen off Great Neck Road and a SOLITARY SANDPIPER was at Magonk Point on August 10th. Ten BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT HERONS are roosting at Millstone Pond.

Groton, Mystic and Stonington: First flowering dates at the Peace Sanctuary include DAYFLOWER on July 20th, GOLDENROD and WILD ONION on the 21st, WHITE-TOPPED ASTER on the 22nd and RATTLE-SNAKE PLANTAIN on the 24th. At Barn Island TURKSCAP LILIES flowered on the 23rd and MEADOW BEAUTIES on the 27th. A RED FOX ran across the road near Whittles Farm on August 6th. A BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER has been seen regularly at Grove Ave. in Mystic since July 26th and BLUE-BIRDS were sitting on 4 eggs in a bird house along River Road on July 27th. A RED-TAILED HAWK was circling over the Stone Acre Farm in Stonington on July 24th. At Barn Island a WILSON'S PETREL was seen from the boat landing on July 14th and PECTORAL SANDPIPERS and a PIED-BILLED GREBE were there on the 30th. The always rare BAIRD'S SANDPIPER was seen there on Aug. 10th. On August 13th a GNATCATCHER, MARSH HAWK and 2 SORA RAILS were at Barn Island.

Rhode Island Shoreline: CARDINAL FLOWER was in bloom on Aug. 4th in Jerusalem, R. I. A KING RAIL, rare in salt water marshes, was seen walking along a ditch at Galilee, R. I. on July 24th.

Contributors to this column were: Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Bates, Grace Bissell, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Bulmer, Robert Dewire, Donald Dupont, Warren Fish, John and Trudy Gardner, Rick Holloway, Danny Huggler, Jim Miller, Walter Moran and William Willetts.

ACTIVITIES FOR SEPTEMBER

Sept. 4--6:15 P.M. Harkness State Park, Waterford. An evening trip to the Park as we watch for woodchuck, bats flying and the final show of wild-flowers.

Sept. 18--6:15 P.M. Barn Island, Stonington. As the fall migration begins we will watch for shore birds and ducks stopping to rest for the evening.

Sept. 21--8:00 A.M. Napatree Point, Watch Hill, R.I. for beachcombing and bird watching. Prepare for a three mile walk... $1\frac{1}{2}$ out, $1\frac{1}{2}$ back... but well worth the time and effort.

Sept. 25--6:15 P.M. Harkness State Park in Waterford. Cool evening, pleasant beach, good company... what more.

Sept. 28--All Day... Now that you have read about the Hawk Migration at Mount Tom on page 13 here is a chance to join with others from the Center for a trip to see it. This trip is restricted to ADULTS ONLY and you should call the Center to register and confirm time, transportation, etc. etc.

ASTRONOMY CLASS: Members who are in the eighth and ninth grade and interested in participating in a special Astronomy Class at Mystic Seaport Planetarium should call the Center for details.

THE THAMES SCIENCE CENTER

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PORCUPINES can protect themselves by simply bristling their coats. Many different and interesting animals are featured in the widely acclaimed Audubon Wildlife Film, "Northwest to Alaska", produced and presented by Walter H. Berlet. Presented here in New London, October 20, 1968.